

**Being an international academic in UK higher education: from euphoria to letting go**

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This study aimed for an understanding of being an international academic in UK higher education. Academic staff mobility has become an area of increasing importance, spurred by initiatives such as the Bologna process and the European Higher Education Area (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015). Specifically in the UK, indications show escalating inflows of international academic staff, with the average number of academic vacancies being filled by non-UK citizens rising from 14% over the years of 2005/08 to 27.2% during 2013/14 (UCEA, 2009; Universities UK, 2015). As the transnational movement of academics continues to increase, it is important to focus not only on numbers, but on the quality of the socio-emotional and educational experiences of this large group to ensure that quality of teaching, student learning and research remain at high standards.

Drawing on a phenomenological approach, fifteen international academics recounted personal experiences in relation to their transition, adjustment, challenges and opportunities of working in the UK. The study focused on foreign-born academics, who finished their terminal degrees and are pursuing academic careers in three North-West Universities of England. Interviews were analysed using phenomenological thematic analysis. The structure of being an international academic in the UK as reported in this study was composed of six themes, reflecting preparation, arrival, adjustment and integration phases: (1) being in a euphoric phase; (2) being in shock; (3) being disoriented in a new land; (4) being willing to let go; (5) being and behaving in new ways; (6) being deep-rooted in the native workplace. The themes concur with previous frameworks of transition and migration within the fields of social psychology and higher education (e.g. Hayes, 2010; Green & Myatt, 2011). Findings highlight the challenges faced by foreign academics and how they were resolved over time, albeit at a particularly heavy emotional toll, and the resilience and strength needed to adapt to their new working environment. The study contributes knowledge about behavioural patterns and perceptions of what the pursuit of internationalisation means for foreign academics specifically in the UK, which is not widely available in the education literature on internationalisation.

**Keywords:** internationalisation, foreign academics, phenomenology.

## References

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